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## Guest Editor's Introduction: Sketches of the Everyday

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# Guest Editor's Introduction: Sketches of the Everyday

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For what do the terms ‘everyday’ and ‘everyday life’ stand? Although many scholars have engaged with the notion of the everyday, the concept remains vaguely defined. Arguably, Rita Felski sums up its main critical points when she contends that the resonance of the ‘everyday’ as a concept stems from its fuzzy ambiguous meanings.<sup>1</sup> It can refer to those practices that are commonplace and taken-for-granted or what happens in a typical and repetitive form. Thus, ‘everydayness is the positive continuity of endless repetition.’<sup>2</sup> For some historians and philosophers, to look at the everyday life meant to investigate how institutions—such as states or prisons—engineer and construct the lives of people. The site of the everyday life allows an exploration of routine actions whose repetition brings stability, order and submission to institutional authorities.

This Special Issue takes the everyday as a space to explore one of the most classical questions that defines the study of politics: the exercise of domination and practices of resistance. The everyday, therefore, is a site where institutions and governments exercise control and domination. Other scholars have explored the realm of the everyday to discover how people refuse being controlled, pointing to those ordinary practices that manipulate the dominant social rules. In this manner, they approach the study of the everyday as a locus where subjects construct creative and strategic actions in order to challenge the grid of discipline and domination, which they perceive as externally imposed on their lives.<sup>3</sup> The study of everyday life can bring to the fore how institutions exercise control and violence over people as it unveils how continuous forms of clandestine and creative manipulation challenge this same grid of domination. It appears that both approaches demonstrate how closely connected is the study of everyday life to questions of power and resistance.<sup>4</sup> By

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<sup>1</sup> Rita Felski (1999) The Invention of Everyday Life, *New Formations*, 39, p. 15; see also Alf Lüdtke (1989) *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Barry Sandywell (2004) The Myth of Everyday Life: Toward a Heterology of the Ordinary, *Cultural Studies*, 18(2–3), p. 163.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Tripp (2014) *The Power and the People: Paths of Resistance in the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

<sup>4</sup> Sherry Ortner (1995) Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographic Refusal, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 37(1), pp. 173–193.

studying the realm of the quotidian, it is possible to observe the gaps between competing normative systems in order to understand the effective exercise of domination and the development of new mechanisms and new practices.<sup>5</sup>

This Special Issue embraces the inherent indecisiveness of the category of everyday life,<sup>6</sup> trying to unfold and develop its hybrid<sup>7</sup> meanings via articles recounting how people experience power, while simultaneously influencing and changing their practices. I contend, moreover, that the sketches of everyday life, ethnographic encounters, jokes and personal anecdotes in this Special Issue reveal the inherent political nature of everyday life. Individuals are born and bounded in political structures that grant privileges to some and impose injustices on others. In their everyday lives, therefore, subjects come to experience, encounter and perceive power, while enacting their agency and shaping their imaginaries, desires and fantasies. The Special Issue does not aim to formalize actions and conducts into a simplistic binary positing power versus resistance,<sup>8</sup> flattening out the whole range of dynamics that describe social order and social change.<sup>9</sup> It tries instead to reflect on the mutual entanglement that connects power and resistance in a dialogical manner, offering sketches and glimpses of ‘the mutual ensnarement of rulers and ruled.’<sup>10</sup> While the study of everyday life can bring to the fore how institutions exercise control and govern people, it also reveals how people constantly play and shape these same patterns of domination.

This Special Issue does so contributing to the larger and growing literature on the concept and its use in the study of politics in the Middle East. It draws on qualitative approaches, ranging from ethnography to oral histories, to privilege a perspective ‘from below.’ To work on the everyday allows us to examine how people sustain or challenge the intimacy of power structures through their conduct, willingly or not. The audacious and attentive perusal of the everyday, nonetheless, requires that people interact constantly with broader historical and structural perspectives. All the articles show how important it is to maintain a constant interdisciplinary dialogue between the fields of anthropology, critical theory, economics, history, international relations, politics and sociology. While their interactions remain essential for an overarching and detailed comprehension of the politics of the Middle East, the articles here also raise important theoretical questions whose validity encompasses other area studies.

### The Revolution and the Everyday

The study of the political anatomy of the everyday, for instance, bears important theoretical repercussions when major events, such as the revolts that have erupted in the MENA region since late 2010,<sup>11</sup> come to disrupt the normative condition of power. Alain Badiou, for

<sup>5</sup> Marysia Galbraith (1999) We just want to live ‘normally’: Intersecting Discourse of Public, Private, Poland and the West, *Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Europe*, 3(1), pp. 2–13; Georges Canguilhem (1991) *The Normal and the Pathological* (New York: Zone Books); see also Michael Hviid Jacobsen (2008) The Everyday: An Introduction to an introduction, in: M. H. Jacobsen (ed.) *Encountering the Everyday—An Introduction to the Sociologies of the Unnoticed* (London: Palgrave MacMillan); and Beatrice Hibou (2011) *Anatomie politique de la domination* [The political anatomy of domination] (Paris: La Decouverte), pp. 27–55.

<sup>6</sup> B. Sandywell, *The Myth of Everyday Life*, p. 174.

<sup>7</sup> I borrow the concept of ‘hybrid’ from Haj Yazidha (2010) Conceptualizing Hybridity: Deconstructing Boundaries through the Hybrid, *Formations*, 1(1), pp. 31–38.

<sup>8</sup> S. Ortner, Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographic Refusal, p. 175.

<sup>9</sup> Deborah Brock, Rebecca Raby & Mark P. Thomas (2011) Unpacking the Centre, in: Brock, Raby & Thomas (eds) *Power and Everyday Practices* (Toronto: Nelson Education), p. 6.

<sup>10</sup> Salwa Ismail (2006) *Political Life in Cairo’s New Quarters: Encountering the Everyday State* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press), p. xxxv.

<sup>11</sup> Sune Haugbolle & Andreas Bandak (2017) The Ends of Revolution: Rethinking Ideology and Time in the Arab Uprisings, *Middle East Critique*, 26(3), pp. 191–204.

instance, argues that an 'Event' is the appearance of a complete new ontological dimension that breaks completely with previous experiences of life.<sup>12</sup> The event marks the appearance of the 'repressed' and renders it visible. Badiou describes the temporal dimension of the event as a moment that 'makes us present in the present,'<sup>13</sup> thus emphasizing the process of creating new possibilities and time. Slavoj Žižek also contends that an 'Event' happens when 'a change of the very frame through which we perceive the world and engage in it' takes place.<sup>14</sup> Undoubtedly, an event is a moment in time that breaks against the normativity of a certain situation, unfolding alternative geographies and power configurations. The event marks a rupture, a caesura with the repetitiousness and ordinariness of the everyday, confronting that power structure within which the everyday is enclosed. The conceptual value of 'events' and revolutions, however, can be epistemologically more romantic but less explanatory and analytical, if lacking its dialectical partner, the everyday.

Scholars risk being trapped in numerous pitfalls and limitations when they deal with events without an adequate and appropriate grasp of everyday dynamics. Revolutions tend to obscure continuities, structural preconditions and enabling conditions that allowed, in the first place, their eruption.<sup>15</sup> Like those studies that focus narrowly on the state, the 'revolutionary' ousting of a president only signals the end of the political authority of a certain regime. Through the spectacle of a revolution, however, it is difficult to grasp how people acknowledged their role in those historical and political developments that supported the power of the regime in the first place. The rhythms of the everyday, therefore, can provide a more reliable 'index of historical development than the brief, sporadically erupting event possibly can.'<sup>16</sup> As Henri Lefebvre noted, 'half a century of historical upheavals have taught us that everyday relations between men—"lived experience"—change more slowly than the structure of the State.'<sup>17</sup> Since the everyday is the 'dialectical partner' of the event, which would have no backdrop against which to emerge, its study is fundamental for those who wish to appreciate and comprehend the nature of the event.<sup>18</sup>

All these connections explain why the study of the everyday matters and deserves scrutiny, particularly when an event disrupts its rhythmical pattern.<sup>19</sup> Revolutions trigger the emergence of those social grievances and demands that otherwise would remain suppressed, but to revolutionize the everyday means building a new ordinariness, while addressing those structures and practices that constituted its unjust nature. The first article of this Special Issue opens up with a powerful inquiry along these lines, exploring power and resistance in the everyday in war-torn Syria: 'Towards an Alternative "Time of the Revolution": Beyond State Contestation, the Struggle for a New Syrian Everyday.' Estella Carpi and Andrea Glioti question popular media narratives of the Syrian uprising in 2011, showing how those

<sup>12</sup> See Alain Badiou (2005) *Being and Event* (London: Bloomsbury), pp. 108–115.

<sup>13</sup> See Ibid. See also A. Badiou (2003) *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press); and A. Badiou (2005) *Metapolitics* (London: Verso Books).

<sup>14</sup> Slavoj Žižek (2014) *Event: Philosophy in Transit* (New York: Penguin Books), p. 10.

<sup>15</sup> See John S. Whitehead & William S. Schneider (1987) The Singular Event and the Everyday Routine: The Interplay of History and Culture in the Shaping of Memory, *The Oral Historical Review*, 15(2), pp. 43–79; and Frank N. Pieke (1996) *The Ordinary and the Extraordinary: An Anthropological Study of Chinese Reform and the 1989 People's Movement in Beijing* (London: Kegan Paul International).

<sup>16</sup> Saikat Majumdar (2013) *Prose of the World: Modernism and the Banality of Empire* (New York: Columbia University Press), p. 171.

<sup>17</sup> Henri Lefebvre (2014) *Critique of Everyday Life: One-Volume Text* (London: Verso), p. 71.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Sayeau (2013) *Against the Event: The Everyday and Evolution of Modernist Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 1–48.

<sup>19</sup> Similarly, see Billie Jeanne Brownlee & Mazyar Ghiabi (2016) Passive, Silent and Revolutionary: The 'Arab Spring' Revisited, *Middle East Critique*, 25(3), pp. 299–316.

who oppose the regime continue to rely on the latter's infrastructure for their quotidian needs. This article provides the reader with insight into the theoretical writings of Syrian intellectuals who tried to imagine an otherwise, alternative form of everyday life detached from the regime's machineries. While the article focuses on the particular difficulties confronting Syrian 'political opponents,' its intricate picture raises a number of critical points to be considered in those countries where similar dynamics are at play, such as Egypt. How is it possible to abandon completely the dominant forces that structure society? The 'revolution' as a popular movement claims to resist and fight an authoritarian power, yet it often locates the source of oppression in moral and monological terms. On the one hand, the authoritarian regime becomes the sole responsible agent for all societal failures. People, on the other hand, neglect their quotidian collusion with power and are unable to acknowledge how power also is interwoven with their everyday. For these reasons, when the authoritarian regime is overthrow and its leader is ousted, such a movement fails to trigger a smooth and peaceful transition to more democratic conditions of power. Rather, as in the case of Libya, the uprising only escalated the sense of powerlessness and victimization among people, which, in turn, justifies and rationalizes further the use of violence. Destruction becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

### Surveillance and Survival in the Everyday

In order to study the everyday as a site where people practice, perceive and experience power, Michel Foucault substituted the questions of 'what' is power with 'how'<sup>20</sup> power functions, shifting the analysis toward the effects of power through repeated conducts and normalized behavior. According to Foucault, power operated as an interrelated 'regime of practices,'<sup>21</sup> a multiplicity of forces—violence being one of them—that support and reverse each other, whose ultimate crystallization is embodied in an institutional apparatus, such as the state.<sup>22</sup> In his seminal work *'Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison,'* in which he examines the work of the jurist-philosopher, Jeremy Bentham, who had drawn an ideal structure of control called the Panopticon,<sup>23</sup> Foucault argues that the major innovation of the Panopticon consisted in replacing force with visibility as a tool of control and power. By individualizing and placing subjects in a state of constant visibility, the efficiency of the prison was maximized and self-discipline substituted for the use of brutal force. The scope of the 'panopticism' was to make prisoners feel constantly observed yet disempowering them to verify fully whether someone constantly is watching over them. Power did not require intervening directly, i.e., through violence upon them, but rather it induced a process of self-discipline among the prisoners. As power controls bodies by turning them into objects of knowledge to control and examine, so any objects of knowledge correspond to a certain configuration of power. In this manner, institutions now could control subjects in a preventive manner, supervising them not at the level of what they do but at the level of what they might do. Power, thus, operates by normalizing society with surveillance and examination, replacing force and coercion.

<sup>20</sup> Michel Foucault (1982) *The Subject and Power*, in: Hubert L. Dreyfus & Paul Rainbow (eds) *Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, p. 217.

<sup>21</sup> Michel Foucault (1978) *A Question of Method*, in: Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon & Peter Miller (eds) *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), p. 75.

<sup>22</sup> M. Foucault (1990) *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (New York: Pantheon Books), pp. 92–93.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 218–219.

Amina Zarrugh's article, 'You exile them in their own countries': The Everyday Politics of Reclaiming the Disappeared in Libya,' highlights the above aspect, thus the role of surveillance and imprisonment during the regime of Mu'ammar Qadhdhafi. It does so, however, by focusing on those collective solidarities that grew among Libyan families as a result of the disappearance of their relatives in the 1990s. Popular unrest, in fact, increased in the 1990s as a result of the detrimental socioeconomic effects of UN-imposed international sanctions and the discontent related to the Libyan intervention in Chad, which had turned into a 13-year military debacle (1973–1987) and resulted in the deaths of almost 2,000 Libyans.<sup>24</sup> At this point, the *Jamāhīrīyah* regime met resistance and opposition, and several groups tried to challenge its power. Every time a political challenge rose against the regime, questioning its legitimacy and popularity, it provoked a backlash with a mixture of restrictive measures, which turned Libya into a disciplinary society. Ranging from further violence to stricter surveillance and imprisonment, the regime aimed to discipline people and subordinate them to its power.

In such an authoritarian context, where surveillance and fear reigned supreme, people went missing, forcibly taken by the regime. The article invites the reader to contemplate on the political value of those mundane, silent but insistent inquiries that Libyan families carried out to know the fate of their loved ones. While the regime created and relied on elaborate surveillance and prison mechanisms to control people, this same strategy planted the seeds for off-the-radar forms of solidarities to grow, bonding people against authoritarian power. In other words, the article highlights those silent actions people used to survive and resist the overarching power of an authoritarian state that did not provide any room for dissent. The article follows the theoretical insights of Michel de Certeau and James C. Scott,<sup>25</sup> whose works suggest an exploration of the realm of the everyday 'to discover how an entire society resists being reduced to social control, how popular procedures (also "miniscule" and quotidian) manipulate the mechanisms of discipline and conform to them only in order to evade them.'<sup>26</sup>

The everyday becomes a locus to study 'the clandestine forms taken by the dispersed, tactical, and makeshift creativity of groups or individuals already caught in the nets of "discipline."'<sup>27</sup> Or, as Scott writes, it permits us to capture the *hidden transcripts*, those down-to-earth, low profiles, behind-the-scenes stratagems and tactics that purposely do not want to come to the fore. Those actions, remaining hidden from the staging of public power, constitute the realm of '*infrapolitics*' and constantly test the limits of what is possible within a certain political regime. For both Scott and de Certeau, all those acts of trickery and creative manipulation of power are crucial to study because they capture those down-to-earth, low profile strategies. They remain hidden from the staging of public power and, more importantly, they test constantly the limits of what is possible within a certain political structure. The quotidian aspect of survival also emerges in the next two articles of this issue, which focus respectively on the everyday life of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan.

In 'Rethinking Palestinian Political Factions,' Perla Issa explores the importance of emotional bonds and personal relations in the everyday life. It does so by examining those dynamics at play that influence Palestinians in Lebanese refugee camps to join political factions, while criticizing their policies and strategies. Issa demonstrates that mutual trust and

<sup>24</sup> Dirk Vandewalle (2006) *A History of Modern Libya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 132.

<sup>25</sup> James C. Scott (1990) *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (London: Yale University Press), p. 4.

<sup>26</sup> Michel de Certeau (1984) *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press), p. xiv.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.



friendship determine the attachment and involvement of an individual with the faction. Such insight challenges the dominant academic understanding of factions as separate structures whose ideologies govern people's commitment. The article shows how geographies of personal emotions and intimate relations connect generations—fathers, sons and grandsons—of Palestinians among each other, determining their commitment to existing political factions. While Palestinian refugees continue to be denied of citizenship and related rights, their strife for alternative mechanisms that hope to replace an absent state also continues. In doing so, everyday encounters and relations affect their choices, rather than ideological discourses.

In such contexts, where displacement, poverty and instability characterize the everyday life of refugees, survival—more than resistance—becomes a dominant modality of quotidian interaction. Survival, in fact, is the core argument that emerges from the everyday experiences of Palestinian refugees in Jordan, according to Michael Vicente Perez in 'The Everyday as Survival among Ex-Gaza Refugees in Jordan.' Perez recounts the story of those ex-Gaza refugees living in a state of limbo, forgotten by the Jordanian state, while struggling to make ends meet. The article demonstrates how the personal search for glimpses of stability and quotidian repetition in working or familial spaces is irreducible to a dichotomous understanding of power *vis-à-vis* resistance. Their endurance and willingness to live a 'normal' life, in fact, indicates how uncertainty has become a radical feature of their existence. The lives of ex-Gaza refugees in Jordan do not belong to the realm of subversion and dismantlement of power structures. Rather, the author urges the reader to reconsider those ordinary realities as accomplishments because they demonstrate aspirations for a better life, whose present 'normality' has become too unstable. These sketches of the everyday reveal themselves as moments of survival and hope for a less insecure reality.

Both of the above articles navigate the popular hopes for secure and stable living conditions, and thus the constant struggle against social (in)security and ideological crisis that Palestinian refugees undergo. They describe the everyday lives of those at the margins of the Jordanian and Lebanese state. Moreover, they capture the widespread sense of crisis and a heightened sense of lack of political and ideological direction in which—more generally—Palestinians live. Seventy years of irreversible Israeli colonial occupation, military defeats, and loss of social and economic security have affected indelibly the lives of millions of Palestinians. Their everyday, therefore, becomes a terrain where cynicism and hope alternate in order to cope with those forces at work that ultimately (re)iterate the power of Israel. In this case, the everyday becomes literally a struggle for survival, where attempts to manipulate power structures ultimately end up (re)producing them.

### Everyday (Re)production of Power

It is important to highlight that survival often translates into a desire for stability that does not challenge the normative structures of power. Rather people endure an attachment to certain clusters of promises and desires, despite the fact that those same attachments impede the achievement of those imagined promises.<sup>28</sup> In this sense, fantasies of happiness and the good life,<sup>29</sup> on the one hand, can contest the political *status quo* because they reveal what people hope for and what alternative political horizons they attach to meanings of the good life. On the other hand, these same fantasies also regulate the present quotidian life as they create

<sup>28</sup> Lauren Berlant (2011) *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press).

<sup>29</sup> The work of Edward Fischer also investigates happiness and good life along these lines of inquiry, see Edward F. Fischer. (2014). *The Good Life: Aspiration, Dignity, and the Anthropology of Wellbeing* (Stanford: Stanford University Press).



possibilities for governing people's conducts in the present. At times, it is the government and its political promises for the future that can orient the aspirations of subjects' agency, while avoiding to (re)address those present inequalities that hinder the lives of people.<sup>30</sup> At other times, it is these attachments to certain elements that impede the achievement of those clusters of hopes, promises and desires. In situations of political instability, there are numerous instruments that function in this manner, such as the promise of political reforms or sports.

In the article 'Lebanese Football: Imagining a Defiant and United Lebanon?', Jamil Mouawad discusses the role of football and, more generally, sports in the everyday politics of post-civil war (1975–1990) Lebanon. The article demonstrates the ambiguity of everyday life, whose nature lends it to multiple interpretations and uses. At first, football events can appear as an umpteenth means to sustain the existing sectarian structure of power in Lebanon, thus a form of 'bread and circuses' that entertains, yet controls, the masses. However, as shown in the article, to navigate sports as an everyday practice also means grasping its power to foster popular defiance. The victorious journey of the Lebanese national football team was able to trigger a form of popular nationalism that ultimately transcended divisions. By aligning the population together, people's everyday experiences *vis-à-vis* sports not only provided a space to imagine an 'otherwise,' thus a united Lebanon, but also challenged the power of a sectarian political elite.

The last article in our Special Issue also provides an important and attentive insight into how people experience and (re)produce sectarianism in the Gulf region. In 'Sectarian Non-Entrepreneurs: The Experience of Everyday Sectarianism in Bahrain and Kuwait,' Thomas Fibiger demonstrates the necessity of navigating quotidian moments of life and captures the insistent circulation of sectarian imaginaries in society, particularly in the aftermath of the 2011 uprisings. The importance of this article lies in how it moves beyond a cursory focus on the role of 'entrepreneurs,' and rather demonstrates how ordinary realities also contribute to the (re)production of sectarian divisions between Shi'a and Sunni. Sectarianism, in fact, can be used to explain and interpret diverse societal grievances. It does not matter whether the subject matter of those ordinary experiences actually is relevant to sectarianism. Rather, it is the act of using those terms of references that matters, not their substance, because they turn sectarianism into a dominant and self-fulfilling prophecy. In this regard, while the article shows how sectarianism has increased in recent years as a result of Saudi Arabia's attempt to control neighboring states by spreading its ultra-conservative vision of Islam (Wahhabism) across the region, everyday experiences have a tendency to favor rather than to challenge the power of the monarchy.

This Special Issue on the Everyday offers diverse, in-depth sketches of everyday life in different Middle East countries. Collectively, the articles unpack the multiple forces at work that structure the everyday's repetitive nature, while gauging how people contribute or challenge their (re)production. While each article investigates how people's mundane actions are deeply entrenched with questions of power, resistance, survival, agency and subjectivity, neither individually nor collectively do they exhaust the variety of interactions that constitute daily life. The everyday remains an ambiguous realm, whose exploration permits to grasp the multiple, repetitive and creative practices, emotions and relations that contribute to the formation and negotiation of power dynamics. These articles embrace such a spirit and compel readers to reflect on the intellectual significance of studying the everyday as a site to comprehend how people experience and collude with power.

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<sup>30</sup> Lisa Wedeen discusses how ideas of the 'good life' fostered protests and quelled dissent in Syria in 2011. See Wedeen (2013) *Ideology and Humor in Dark Times: Notes from Syria*, *Critical Inquiry*, 39, pp. 843–873.

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